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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001824

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STATE FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: MALDIVES: OPPOSITION FIGURE'S DAUGHTER SENTENCED
TO TEN YEARS

REF: COLOMBO 1716

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

1. (U) Jennifer Latheef, daughter of Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) Spokesman Mohamed Latheef, was sentenced by the Criminal Court on October 18 to 10 years in prison on terrorism charges. The charges stemmed from Jennifer's participation in a September 2003 demonstration in Male' protesting the death of a detainee in prison. She pleaded not guilty to all charges. Although her trial ended in July 2004, the verdict and sentence were handed down only today--after an inexplicable 14-month delay. Four other suspects were given sentences of between ten and eleven years in the same case.

2. (SBU) Mohamed Latheef, who lives in self-imposed exile in Colombo, alleged to poloff in an October 18 conversation that the charges against his daughter were fabricated by the Government of Republic of Maldives (GORM) as a way of getting back at him. According to Latheef, the government's case against his daughter consisted of police "eyewitness" statements--including one from an officer who admitted he had his back turned at the time--that Jennifer had thrown a stone at a police constable and another statement from an eyewitness that Jennifer was observed in heated conversation with the driver of a police vehicle that was later set on fire by protesters. (Note: Six of the seven prosecution witnesses against Jennifer were policemen.) Although the GORM alleged the stone-throwing resulted in "grievous bodily injury" to the constable, it produced no evidence, such as a medical report, to back up that claim, Latheef contended. Other opposition activists agreed with Latheef's assessment, noting that Jennifer was originally released from custody in November 2003 and told no charges would be filed against her. After her father moved to Sri Lanka and began vocally opposing the GORM from there in April 2004, however, a case against her was filed two months later.

3. (SBU) Poloff's efforts to reach the Attorney General's office on October 18 were unsuccessful. Chief Government Spokesman Mohamed Shareef, however, confirmed the sentence to us, explaining that the terrorism charge was based on eyewitness accounts that Jennifer Latheef had assaulted a police officer, necessitating that he be airlifted to Colombo for medical treatment, and had instigated acts of arson against the Elections Office, a police vehicle and a police post. When asked if other evidence besides the statements of eyewitnesses had been submitted, Shareef said that he believed that videotapes of the protest had been offered as evidence, although he stopped short of saying that the videotapes captured Jennifer Latheef actually engaged in any acts of terrorism.

4. (SBU) Shareef maintained that the GORM had taken special pains to ensure the fairness of Jennifer Latheef's trial. For example, in an effort to allow public access to the proceedings, the GORM had rented out a large auditorium to accommodate spectators. Second, an "independent" investigation had been conducted by a group of "eminent persons" not subject to pressure from the executive branch, he averred. Third, Latheef had access to legal counsel throughout the course of the proceedings.

5. (C) Comment: We have not reviewed the evidence against Latheef, but past experience suggests that the GORM applies terrorism charges against a wide range of activities it finds distasteful, such as opposition protests. When the Ambassador met Attorney General Dr. Hassan Saeed in Male' on September 27 (Reftel), the AG said that he believed that Mohamed Nasheed, the detained chairman of the MDP, was very close to coming to an "understanding" with the GORM about the seriousness of the charges he faces. The 14-month gap between the trial and the verdict/sentencing, as well as the harshness of the sentence, could be an effort by the GORM to apply pressure on Nasheed to cut a deal with the prosecution. LUNSTEAD